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Viewing cable 08ATHENS1668, GREECE/TURKEY TALKS ON ILLEGAL MIGRANTS: LITTLE

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS1668	2008-12-12 13:23	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2018
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SUBJECT: GREECE/TURKEY TALKS ON ILLEGAL MIGRANTS: LITTLE
PROGRESS AS NUMBERS GROW

REF: A. ATHENS 1387
[1](#)B. 07 ATHENS 2305

Classified By: DCM Deborah McCarthy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) A Greek delegation visited Ankara in mid-November

for the third round of discussions aimed at improving implementation of the protocol the two countries signed in 2001 on re-admission of illegal migrants. Over the last two years, the number of migrants using Greece's Aegean islands as an entry-way to Europe has grown dramatically, and Greek officials have repeatedly expressed frustration to us that Turkey takes only a small portion of them back, despite the commitment to re-admit that Turkey undertook in 2001. Greek participants told us the talks were amicable but the Turks were unwilling to seriously discuss the main Greek objective: opening up the port of Izmir as a return point for the migrants. Izmir is listed in the protocol as a return point, but the Greeks say their Turkish interlocutors ruled out any re-admission on the Anatolian coast for unspecified "security reasons." Some returns do occur at the land border between the two countries, but Greek officials say the logistical and bureaucratic hurdles involved in transferring aliens detained at sea to the land border make it very difficult to get them there within the three-month period specified in the protocol. End Summary.

No Breakthrough in Ankara

12. (C) We received readouts of the talks from two Greek participants: Coast Guard Security Directorate Commander Yannis Chortis on November 28 and MFA C4 Directorate (Justice and Home Affairs/Schengen) First Counselor Ioannis Raptakis on December 4. They were also joined in Ankara by a representative of the Hellenic Police. Chortis and Raptakis came back with the same impression of the talks: the Turks were nice interlocutors who made some positive comments about speeding up Turkish bureaucratic procedures to respond to Greek requests for re-admissions, but they were entirely closed to the one change the Greeks consider most important to making re-admissions happen -- the use of Izmir port. Chortis and Raptakis are deeply concerned about the increase in illegal migration though the Aegean in the last two years. The Greek Coast Guard has already detained well over 100,000 illegal migrants this year, with nearly all arriving in Greece after transiting through Turkey en route from such places as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The numbers have all but overwhelmed local Greek authorities on the islands, leading to overcrowding and poor conditions at detention centers, political tensions within Greece, and a steady stream of onward migration by these migrants to Italy and elsewhere in Europe (ref A). There is also a danger that terrorists from conflict zones in the Middle East could use this wave of immigration to infiltrate into Europe.

13. (C) The bilateral protocol was seen as a major achievement when it was signed, but as Raptakis explained to us it has never functioned fully. The protocol identifies three re-admission points in each country; for Turkey they are Izmir port, the land border crossing at Ipsala, and Istanbul Ataturk Airport. In practice, however, the Turks have only permitted re-admissions at Ipsala. This makes the process much more difficult for the Greeks, Raptakis and Chortis explained, because the Coast Guard must hand the migrants over to the police who process them through Athens. Raptakis said that it has typically taken the Turks 30 to 40 days to respond to Greeks requests to re-admit specific individuals. Given this time lag and the logistical requirements, Raptakis said, a migrant is unlikely to be turned over to the Turks within the required three-month limit even if the Turks agree to the re-admission. Raptakis acknowledged that his Turkish interlocutors had indicated they would try to accelerate their internal process, but he was skeptical about whether this would really happen. In the meantime, he said, the Turks dismissed Greek requests to do re-admissions at Izmir, citing "security reasons" that they would not further explain. When Raptakis suggested finding another port if Izmir was a problem, the Turks responded that they were not ready to accept any re-admissions on the Anatolian coast.

14. (C) Raptakis said the Turks accept migrants only from countries with which Turkey has a re-admission agreement, primarily Iraq and Iran. In these cases, the Turks say they are accepting the migrants "for transit," and they charge the

Greeks a 71-Euro fee to return each person to Iraq or Iran. Raptakis said the Greek police pay this fee, albeit unhappily. He said the Turks refuse to accept Afghans, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, or other nationalities entirely. Raptakis said he argued to the Turks that if their two countries enforced the protocol more effectively, word would

quickly circulate among the smugglers and the immigrant communities, with the result that fewer migrants would be likely to try to use the Aegean route to enter Europe. Raptakis said the Turks seemed unmoved by this argument.

Comment

15. (C) Greek officials have continued to raise the implementation of the protocol with the Turks at levels from the Foreign Minister (ref B) on down, and the next round of talks on the issue is scheduled to take place within six months. Despite their frustration over the problem, Greek officials believe there would have to be political will in Turkey to make significant progress on re-admission. Chortis acknowledged to us that the Turks face an even bigger problem with illegal migrants than Greece does. For both countries, there is undoubtedly an incentive not to try too hard to stop the aliens from moving on, passing the burden to the next country on the route (for the Turks, Greece; for the Greeks, Italy and Western Europe). There are also difficult questions about human rights; both Greece and Turkey received strong criticism in a recent Human Rights Watch report on treatment of the migrants. Nevertheless, it seems clear to everyone -- and certainly to the Greek officials we have engaged on this issue -- that the current system is broken. As the numbers of migrants increase, the system's failure to manage the flow will likely have even greater consequences.

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